

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

**DR. MAHATHIR MOHAMAD'S
APPEALS IN SPEECHES ON
RHETORICAL HUMANITARIAN
THEMES****MJSSH**
Muallim Journal of
Social Science and HumanitiesSheela Faizura Nik Fauzi*¹, Su-Hie Ting²¹ Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Sarawak, Malaysia.Email: sheelafaizura@uitm.edu.my² Faculty of Education, Language and Communication, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Malaysia.Email: shting@unimas.my

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33306/mjssh/319>**Abstract**

This study examined how Dr. Mahathir Mohamad employed Aristotelian rhetorical appeals and sub themes in six speeches on humanitarian theme during his second term as Prime Minister of Malaysia. Employing Braun and Clarke's (2008) thematic analysis, findings reveal a dominant reliance on pathos (61.81%) over logos (27.45%) and ethos (10.74%) which highlight Dr. Mahathir's strategic use of emotional engagement to mobilize empathy for pressing humanitarian issues such as refugee crises, global solidarity, and environmental justice. Three overarching themes emerge which are critique of Western hegemony, Malaysia's distinct approach vis-à-vis Western powers, and calls for an equitable international framework. The sub themes reflect how rhetorical strategies can shape discourses on global crises. These results contribute to the broader scholarship on political rhetoric by illustrating how emotion-driven appeals and nationalist positioning can influence policy debates and galvanize international support. Practically, they suggest that leaders seeking to promote humanitarian reforms might prioritize emotive rhetoric and culturally resonant themes to strengthen calls for fairer global governance. Future research could expand this analysis to a wider range of Dr. Mahathir's speeches and compare them across different political contexts to refine understanding of how rhetorical approaches evolve in response to shifting global humanitarian challenges.

Keywords: Humanitarian, Rhetorical Appeal, Political Speeches, Malaysia

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Received 2nd January 2025, revised 6th February 2025, accepted 26th February 2025

Introduction

The global landscape is increasingly marked by humanitarian crises ranging from armed conflicts and natural disasters to widespread poverty and forced migration (Ide, 2023; Schmid & Raju, 2021; McGoldrick, 2015). These crises have reflected the vulnerability of human populations and the inadequacies of international responses in mitigating suffering and addressing the root causes of these problems. As geopolitical tensions rise and climate change exacerbates, more people are displaced and deprived of basic necessities and at risk of exploitation (Telford, 2023; Sweijs et. al., 2022).

One of the most devastating humanitarian crises in modern times is the ongoing conflict in Syria which began in 2011 (Ilcan, 2022). Over a decade later, the country remains mired in a civil war that has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives and displaced millions of people both internally and externally (Karakus et.al., 2020). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), over 6.6 million Syrians have been forced to flee the country by seeking asylum in neighboring countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan (Morris, 2021). The conflict has decimated infrastructure which leaves the people without access to healthcare, clean water, and basic necessities. The humanitarian response has been complicated by the involvement of multiple foreign powers and politicisation of aid (Beigbeder, 2023). The Syrian crisis illustrates how prolonged conflict leads to immediate human suffering and creates long-term challenges for reconstruction, reconciliation, and regional stability.

Another humanitarian issue is the plight of the Rohingya, a predominantly Muslim minority group in Myanmar who has experienced ethnic cleansing. In 2017, following military crackdowns in Myanmar's Rakhine state, more than 700,000 Rohingya fled to neighboring Bangladesh to escape mass killings, sexual violence, and the destruction of their villages (Islam, 2024). The refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, now hosts nearly one million Rohingya which makes it the largest refugee settlement in the world (Ullah, 2023). The humanitarian toll of the Israel-Palestine conflict is most visible in the Gaza Strip where blockades, military incursions, and airstrikes have left the population in a state of perpetual hardship. The Israel-Palestine conflict continues to fuel instability and suffering in the Middle East (Nazir, 2022). The conflict which was rooted in territorial disputes, religious differences, and competing national narratives has resulted in human rights violations, displacement, and loss of life (Ruohomaki, 2020). As of 2023, the United Nations estimates that nearly 2 million Palestinian refugees live under severe restrictions with limited access to clean water, healthcare, and electricity (Ezugwu, 2023).

The global community faces pressure to adopt a more cohesive and compassionate approach to humanitarian interventions. International organizations such as the United Nations' attempt to provide relief through policy frameworks like the Sustainable Development Goals (Carlsen & Bruggemann, 2022; Ul Islam, 2022). The world leaders also have an essential role in shaping both the discourse and the responses to these challenges. Through their speeches and policy declarations, they influence international collaboration, prioritize humanitarian aid, and advocate for global justice. For example, during the 2015 European migrant crisis, Angela Merkel set an example of compassion with her declaration of "*Wir schaffen das*" (We can do this). She affirmed Germany's commitment to welcoming refugees and framing the crisis as a moral challenge (Muller-Brandeck-Bocquet, 2022). Meanwhile, Barack Obama consistently emphasized diplomacy and collective action as stated in his Athens speech where he acknowledged the importance of humanitarian aid and global partnerships in fostering peace (Theodoropoulou,

2020). As UN Secretary-General, Guterres (2020) consistently called for multilateral cooperation to address global crises such as displacement and climate change by advocating for unified global responses to alleviate suffering.

Despite the significant role world leaders play in addressing global humanitarian crises, there is limited scholarly analysis that specifically focuses on how their speeches shape and influence international responses to such crises. While existing studies have explored the impact of policies and diplomatic actions (Heibach, 2024; R.M. Elshobake & Mohammed Alashqar, 2024; Jaafar & Rahman, 2020; Milner, 2020), the rhetorical strategies used by leaders to gain global cooperation and humanitarian aid were not given emphasis. There is a need to examine how a global leader like Dr. Mahathir employs rhetorical strategies in his speeches to unpack his humanitarian visions in crisis intervention. The study examined rhetorical appeals and themes in Dr. Mahathir Mohamad's speeches on humanitarian causes. The objectives of this study were to analyse the rhetorical strategies used by Dr. Mahathir in his speeches to influence international responses to humanitarian crises and to identify the themes of humanitarian visions expressed in these speeches.

Literature Review

Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad has been an influential figure in Southeast Asian politics and on the global stage. As the longest-serving elected leader in Asia and Malaysia's longest-serving prime minister (Tew, 2020), he has frequently addressed a wide array of humanitarian concerns ranging from economic inequality (Khoo, 2021), human rights (Muzaffar, 2021), international justice and peace (Tariq et al., 2023). On the international front, Dr. Mahathir has been speaking out against war, especially in the context of conflicts in the Middle East (Udin et al., 2020). He has been an outspoken critic of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by condemning the disproportionate use of force by Israel against Palestinians and the lack of meaningful intervention by the international community (Yusoff & Enh, 2021). He highlighted injustice and inequality (Chong & Balakrishnan, 2016) in the suffering of the Palestinians by calling for a just and lasting solution to the conflict that respects their right to self-determination. He argued that war only leads to unnecessary suffering and that conflicts should be resolved through diplomacy and dialogue (Martin, 2019). It has made him a prominent voice in global forums advocating disarmament, conflict resolution, and the promotion of international law (Chin & Dosch, 2015; Mukhtaruddin, 2021).

A pivotal element of Dr. Mahathir's humanitarian philosophy is his critique of Western hegemony and double standards in global governance. He argued that powerful nations often impose their values and policies on weaker states under the guise of promoting democracy and human rights while simultaneously contributing to global inequality and injustice (Mohamad, 2010). His speeches had often drawn attention to the plight of countries frequently subjected to unfair treatment in international relations, trade, and diplomacy. His advocacy for nations to have an equal voice in global decision-making stems from this conviction that true humanitarianism must be grounded in fairness and respect for sovereignty (Chong, 2020).

Another key element in Dr. Mahathir's speeches is his critique of global economic inequality and exploitation (Shukri, 2024) which resulted in the structural imbalances of the global economic system. Dr. Mahathir had been particularly critical of international financial institutions,

such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank which imposed unfair conditions on developing countries in exchange for financial assistance (Mumtaz, 2023). These conditions often lead to further impoverishment and exploitation of vulnerable populations (Rethel, 2020). He has called for a more equitable global economic system where developing countries are given the opportunity to grow and prosper without being subjected to unfair trade practices and economic exploitation (Kamaruddin, & Rogers, 2020). He had advocated for reforms to the international financial system such as debt relief for heavily indebted poor countries and fairer trade policies that allow developing nations to compete on a level playing field (Kaplinsky & Kraemer-Mbula, 2022).

Under his leadership, Malaysia experienced significant socio-economic development with a focus on improving the education welfare of the poor and underprivileged (Aun, 2021) as a tool for social mobility and empowerment (Haryono & Ziegenhain, 2022). Dr. Mahathir has emphasised that access to quality education is a fundamental human right and that it is the responsibility of governments to ensure that every child has the opportunity to succeed (Jaes et. al., 2020). His commitment to improving education was evident as he implemented policies aimed at enhancing educational infrastructure and access for rural and marginalized communities (Elsayed & Gurkaynak, 2022). Dr. Mahathir's humanitarian worldview is fundamentally centred on education as a socio-economic mechanism for alleviating poverty and enhancing quality of life.

In issues of climate change, Dr. Mahathir has emphasised the need for global solidarity and cooperation by arguing that they cannot be solved by individual countries acting in isolation (Iqbal et. al., 2022). He called for a more humane approach to addressing the plight of refugees and migrants by urging countries to provide assistance and support to those fleeing war, persecution, and poverty (Fadzilah & Mohd Noor, 2021). He highlighted the disproportionate impact of environmental degradation on poorer nations, who suffer the most from the effects of climate change (Aziz, 2023). Accountability from developed nations and multinational corporations is crucial so they will be responsible for the environmental impact and support developing countries in their efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

Moreover, Dr. Mahathir emphasised an equitable distribution of resources and technology to support nations in their climate adaptation and mitigation efforts. He reflected on the importance of international frameworks to hold developed nations accountable for their environmental impact by ensuring that they provide financial and technological support to those most affected by climate change (Iqbal et al., 2022; Chin, 2018). In his perspective, climate change is a global moral issue that requires solidarity, empathy, and collective action to ensure a just and humane future. By advocating these principles, Dr. Mahathir positioned climate action as a moral imperative for developed and developing nations to address the crisis equitably.

Method

The data for this study consist of six international speeches delivered by Dr. Mahathir during his second tenure as Prime Minister of Malaysia from 2018 to 2020. These speeches were selected based on their relevance to humanitarian issues as they address topics such as global solidarity, refugee protection and environmental justice. The speeches were sourced from a reliable and formal website which was www.pmo.gov.my to ensure their authenticity and credibility. The

unique links from www.pmo.gov.my to each speech is scannable via QR Code in Table 1. The total word count of the six speeches is 7,514 words comprising 419 sentences.

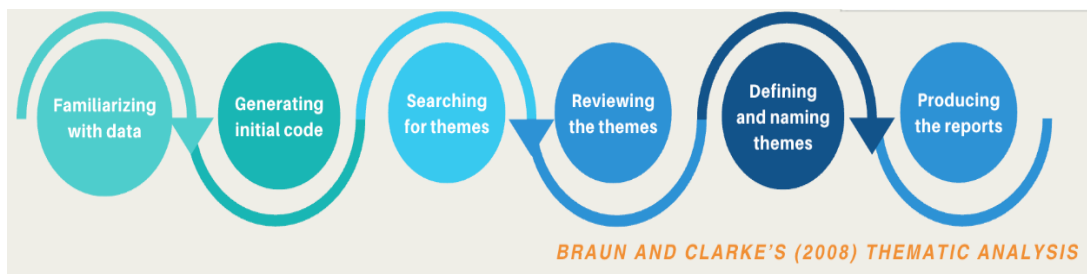
Table 1
Dr. Mahathir's Speeches

No	Title of Speech	Word count	Venue	Date	Source
Speech 1	General Debate of the 73rd Session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA)	2265	UN General Headquarters, New York, USA	28 September 2018	https://www.pmo.gov.my/ucapan/index.php?m=p&p=mahathir2&id=4432
Speech 2	20th ASIAN Association of Management Organisations (AAMO) Triennial Gala Dinner And Awards Night	691	Istana Hotel, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia	29 April 2019	https://www.pmo.gov.my/ucapan/index.php?m=p&p=mahathir2&id=4462
Speech 3	9th Annual Grand Iftar with the Palestinian Community in Malaysia	937	Dewan Seri Endon, Puspanitapuri, Putrajaya, Malaysia	22 May 2019	https://www.pmo.gov.my/ucapan/index.php?m=p&p=mahathir2&id=4474
Speech 4	XVII Summit of Heads of State & Government of the NAM	1839	Plenary Hall, Baku Congress, Azerbaijan	25 October 2019	https://www.pmo.gov.my/ucapan/index.php?m=p&p=mahathir2&id=4529
Speech 5	Kuala Lumpur Summit 2019	620	Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia	19 December 2019	https://www.pmo.gov.my/ucapan/index.php?m=p&p=mahathir2&id=4543
Speech 6	3rd Conference of The League of "Parliamentarians for Al-Quds"	1162	One World Hotel, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia	8 February 2020	https://www.pmo.gov.my/ucapan/index.php?m=p&p=mahathir2&id=4553
TOTAL		7514			

As the research framework, the study employed Aristotle's rhetorical appeals of ethos, pathos and logos and Braun and Clarke's (2008) thematic analysis. Aristotle's rhetorical appeals are foundational elements in analyzing persuasive communication. Ethos refers to the credibility or ethical appeal of Dr. Mahathir where his authority, trustworthiness, and character help persuade the audience. Pathos involves appealing to the emotions of the audience by aiming to evoke feelings such as sympathy, anger, or compassion to support the argument. Logos is the logical appeal where Dr. Mahathir uses reason, facts, and evidence to build a convincing argument. The study uses these appeals as a framework to analyze how Dr. Mahathir structures his speeches to persuade his audience on humanitarian issues.

Figure 1

Braun and Clarke's (2008) Thematic Analysis



Braun and Clarke's (2008) thematic analysis is a qualitative method used to identify, analyse, and report patterns or themes within data. The method helps in understanding how specific ideas such as justice, solidarity, or responsibility are consistently expressed and constructed through his rhetoric. The data was familiarized through immersion in Dr. Mahathir's speeches to identify broad patterns. Initial codes were then generated to organize the data into manageable chunks. Themes were developed, reviewed, refined, and defined before being synthesized into a coherent report highlighting dominant themes. Combining rhetorical appeals and thematic analysis enables a comprehensive analysis of both the persuasive techniques and the key messages in Dr. Mahathir's speeches.

Results and Discussion

Table 2 presents an analysis of rhetorical appeals across six speeches delivered by Dr. Mahathir. It highlights the frequency of each appeal in terms of percentages, based on number of sentences, and how often each rhetorical strategy appears in each speech. Across the six speeches, pathos is the most frequently used rhetorical strategy (61.81% of 419 appeals). It indicates Dr. Mahathir's strong reliance on emotional persuasion to connect with his audience when addressing humanitarian issues such as refugees, global solidarity, and environmental degradation.

Table 2
Rhetorical Appeals in Dr. Mahathir's Speeches

No	No of Sentences	Pathos	(%)	Logos	(%)	Ethos	(%)
Speech 1	162	95	58.64	55	33.95	12	7.41
Speech 2	33	17	51.52	2	6.06	14	42.42
Speech 3	36	23	63.89	9	25	4	11.11
Speech 4	110	77	70	26	23.64	7	6.36
Speech 5	30	26	86.67	3	10	1	3.33
Speech 6	48	21	43.75	20	41.67	7	14.58
TOTAL	419	259	61.81	<i>115</i>	<i>27.45</i>	45	10.74

The high percentages of pathos are evident especially in Speech 5 where emotional appeal dominates at 86.67%. The speech articulates the struggles of the Muslim Ummah by addressing sensitive issues such as vilification, Islamophobia, and internal conflicts within Muslim countries. It emphasizes the collective pain and frustration of Muslims due to global misperceptions, their diminished status in the world, and the pressing need for unity, justice, and revival of the Islamic civilization. By evoking shared emotional experiences and drawing attention to the plight of the Muslim community, the speech strategically uses pathos to inspire reflection and action among its audience.

In contrast, logos makes up 27.45% of the total appeals. Dr. Mahathir uses logical arguments to substantiate his claims although less frequently than emotional persuasion. It suggests that while reasoned arguments are important in his speeches, they play a secondary role compared to emotional engagement. Logos is most prevalent in Speech 1 where 33.95% of the speech focuses on logical appeals. It possibly indicates a focus on factual and rational arguments to present Malaysia's commitment to good governance, human rights, and sustainable development within the framework of the United Nations' goals. This is evident in Dr. Mahathir's structured reasoning when discussing global issues such as terrorism, economic inequalities, environmental sustainability, and international trade injustices. He provides detailed examples such as the plight of Palestinians, the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar, and the challenges faced by small nations in a globalized world to argue for reforms in governance and international collaboration. The speech emphasizes Malaysia's efforts to lead by example, citing initiatives like sustainable palm oil certification and adherence to UN principles. He presented a logical case for collective global action rooted in fairness, mutual respect, and practical solutions.

Ethos appears to be the least used rhetorical appeals across the speeches with only 10.74%. Dr. Mahathir's reputation as a well-respected leader likely enables him to rely less on explicit assertions of credibility as it is often implicitly understood. However, ethos is notably more prominent in Speech 2 (42.42%) suggesting that Dr. Mahathir may have needed to emphasize his personal authority or experience to bolster his arguments on effective leadership and nation-

building. He draws on his extensive tenure as Prime Minister and his unique experiences in managing a diverse nation like Malaysia to establish credibility. By likening the management of a nation to his background as a medical doctor of diagnosing problems, prescribing remedies, and sometimes making tough decisions, he denotes his pragmatic approach to governance. His reflections on Malaysia's journey from colonial subjugation to a modern, sovereign nation further reinforce his role as a visionary leader who has guided the country through challenging times. Through these personal anecdotes and professional parallels, Dr. Mahathir effectively uses ethos to inspire trust and admiration by demonstrating his unwavering commitment to Malaysia's prosperity and dignity.

Overall, the results of Table 2 reveal that Dr. Mahathir leans heavily on emotional appeals in his speeches to galvanize support and empathy for humanitarian causes, particularly highlighting the plight of marginalized and oppressed communities such as the Palestinians, Rohingya refugees, and victims of global inequality. This reliance on pathos, as evidenced by the highest percentage across all rhetorical strategies (61.81%), reflects his ability to connect deeply with his audience by evoking shared values, moral outrage, and a sense of urgency. By painting vivid pictures of injustice and suffering, Dr. Mahathir effectively fosters emotional engagement and drives home the necessity of addressing these issues through collective effort and global solidarity.

Sub Themes of Humanitarian Issues in Dr. Mahathir's speeches

Three key themes on humanitarian causes were identified from an analysis of Dr. Mahathir's speeches. There are his critique of Western dominance, his emphasis on differentiating Malaysia from Western powers, and his efforts to assert Malaysia's stance on international affairs.

Sub Theme 1: Critique of Western Dominance

Dr. Mahathir critiqued the systemic inequalities perpetuated by Western-centric policies. In speech 1, Dr. Mahathir criticised Western dominance in global trade, where rich nations exploited the vulnerability of smaller economies under the guise of free trade. He highlighted the hypocrisy of Western nations imposing protectionist barriers on goods from developing countries while championing open markets for their own products. Dr. Mahathir exposed how Western nations manipulated narratives to maintain their economic supremacy by using the example of Malaysian palm oil, which had been unfairly targeted by Western campaigns. This economic critique resonated with the broader theme of systemic Western exploitation, where the rules of global trade were designed to perpetuate dependency and inequality. It aligns with Khoo (1995) analysis which highlighted how Dr. Mahathir consistently opposed Western hegemony in economic systems, particularly during the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis when he rejected IMF-imposed austerity measures in favor of localized solutions.

Dr. Mahathir's speeches frequently addressed how Western nations leveraged global institutions to maintain political dominance. In speech 4, he emphasised the inequities embedded in the United Nations' structure, particularly the veto power held by five permanent members of the Security Council, most of whom are Western or Western-aligned powers. He argued that the veto system undermined the democratic ideals espoused by the UN and allowed powerful nations to act with impunity while dictating terms to the rest of the world. His proposal for reforming the

veto system reflected his call for a more equitable global order that challenged the entrenched dominance of the West. Faruqi (2008) noted that Dr. Mahathir's criticism of global institutions aligns with his broader advocacy for fair governance as seen in his efforts to promote democratization within international organizations.

Speech 3 and speech 6 focused on the cultural and political dimensions of Western dominance, particularly through the lens of the Palestinian struggle. Dr. Mahathir condemned Western nations for their unwavering support of Israel, often at the expense of international law and human rights. He described how Western powers, by legitimizing Israel's actions and disregarding Palestinian suffering, perpetuated a neo-colonial dynamic in the Middle East. This critique mirrored the analysis provided by Sani and Mohd (2008) which underscored Dr. Mahathir's use of the Palestinian issue as a symbol of broader Western imperialistic tendencies in the Muslim world.

In speech 5, Dr. Mahathir advocated for the sovereignty and self-determination of Muslim nations by urging them to unite against external interference often orchestrated by Western powers. He critiqued the dependency of Muslim countries on Western technology and military supplies, framing this reliance as a barrier to true independence. Similarly, in speech 2, he discussed the challenges of leading a nation through the lens of post-colonial recovery by emphasizing the importance of self-reliance and rejecting Western prescriptions for governance and development. This aligns with Muzaffar's (2021) observations that Dr. Mahathir's persistent call for Muslim nations to collaborate and resist neo-colonial dependencies, emphasizing Malaysia's leadership in promoting unity and resilience among the Global South. Through these critiques, Dr. Mahathir positions Malaysia as a vocal advocate for justice and equity, challenging the entrenched dominance of Western powers across economic, political, and cultural spheres.

Sub Theme 2: Differentiation of Malaysia from the West

Dr. Mahathir positions Malaysia as a nation that values independence and justice by contrasting it with the often unilateral, exploitative, and imperialistic tendencies of the West. In speech 1, Dr. Mahathir emphasised Malaysia's commitment to multilateralism and fair governance within the international community. He criticized the dominance of Western powers in global institutions such as the United Nations, particularly the inequitable veto system that prioritized the interests of a few at the expense of global democracy. By advocating for reforms and calling for a veto structure requiring broader consensus, he distinguished Malaysia's approach as one rooted in justice and equality in contrast to the West's protection of its geopolitical advantages. This aligns with findings by Ridzuan et.al. (2021) which highlighted Dr. Mahathir's consistent efforts to reform international institutions as a means of empowering smaller nations and promoting equitable governance on the global stage.

Dr. Mahathir reaffirmed Malaysia's stance on non-alignment by rejecting dependency on Western nations and their ideologies in speech 5. He highlighted Malaysia's preference for forging its path by collaborating with nations of the Global South while maintaining sovereignty. This non-aligned position differentiated Malaysia from Western-aligned nations and reflected a desire to escape the ideological and economic impositions that often come with Western partnerships. Gerstl (2020) reflected how Dr. Mahathir's leadership prioritized partnerships among developing nations to resist Western hegemony while fostering mutual cooperation.

In speech 3, he emphasized Malaysia's unwavering support for Palestine by contrasting it with the West's biased and selective application of international law. While Western powers often shield Israel from accountability, Malaysia consistently champions the rights of oppressed communities by reflecting its stance as an advocate for global justice and humanitarian values. This is consistent with findings by Yusoff and Enh (2021) which noted Dr. Mahathir's use of Palestine as a central issue to highlight Malaysia's commitment to justice, contrasting with the West's complicity in perpetuating oppression in the region.

In speech 2, Dr. Mahathir outlined Malaysia's distinct approach to economic development, emphasizing self-reliance and fair practices. By highlighting the importance of managing diversity and fostering unity without resorting to the divisive or exploitative policies often seen in Western-dominated systems, he presented Malaysia as a model for equitable governance. Furthermore, his criticism of Western-dominated trade systems that disadvantage developing nations underscored Malaysia's commitment to equitable partnerships by setting it apart from the exploitative tendencies of the West. According to Lau et. al. (2020), Dr. Mahathir's policies emphasised the need for localized solutions and equitable trade practices as a foundation for Malaysia's sustainable growth.

Speech 6 emphasised Malaysia's unique position as a leader in the Muslim world. Dr. Mahathir called for unity among Muslim nations to counter Western dominance and reduce dependency on Western technologies and policies. He highlighted Malaysia's efforts to lead by example, fostering collaboration based on Islamic principles of justice, mutual respect, and cooperation. This stands in stark contrast to the often transactional and interest-driven foreign policies of Western nations. Shukri (2023) described how Dr. Mahathir's speeches consistently framed Malaysia as a unifying force within the Muslim world, challenging Western narratives and encouraging self-reliance.

Dr. Mahathir often drew on Malaysia's experience as a developing nation to differentiate it from Western models of governance. In his speeches, he emphasized practical approaches to nation-building, such as balancing economic growth with social harmony and cultural preservation. He likened governance to medical diagnosis by advocating for solutions tailored to specific contexts rather than the imposition of one-size-fits-all Western models in speech 2. This approach is highlighted by Kuik (2023) who credited his tailored governance strategies for Malaysia's stability and growth, contrasting sharply with Western-imposed solutions that often fail to account for local realities. By addressing economic, political, and cultural dimensions, Dr. Mahathir's speeches firmly establish Malaysia as a principled and independent voice on the global stage, distinct from Western-centric models of governance and policy.

Sub Theme 3: Reflecting Malaysia's Stance on International Affairs

Dr. Mahathir's speech 1 exemplified Malaysia's strong commitment to multilateralism. By advocating for reforms to the Security Council and emphasizing the importance of collective decision-making, he reflected Malaysia's belief in a rules-based international order. This stance positions Malaysia as a proponent of fair and inclusive global governance by rejecting unilateralism and hegemony. This aligns with Zhao (2024) who highlights Malaysia's diplomatic efforts under Dr. Mahathir to strengthen multilateral frameworks as a counterbalance to the dominance of powerful nations, positioning the country as a champion for equity in global governance.

Speech 4 highlighted Malaysia's adherence to the principles of sovereignty and non-interference. He criticized the tendency of powerful nations to impose their will on weaker states, often under the guise of promoting democracy or human rights. Malaysia's stance prioritized the right of nations to determine their own destinies without external interference, which reflected a broader commitment to respecting national sovereignty in international relations. According to Tajudin and Yusuff (2020), Dr. Mahathir's non-interference policy and advocacy for sovereignty were key elements in Malaysia's foreign relations strategy, enabling the country to assert its independence while building meaningful partnerships with nations of the Global South.

Dr. Mahathir's unwavering support for Palestine, as expressed in speech 3 and speech 6, highlighted Malaysia's moral stance on international affairs. He condemned the ongoing occupation of Palestinian territories and the complicity of Western powers in perpetuating the oppression of Palestinians. By calling for the recognition of Palestine as a sovereign state and the return of Palestinian lands, Dr. Mahathir reaffirmed Malaysia's role as a vocal advocate for justice and human rights on the global stage. This stance is supported by Karim (2021), who noted that Dr. Mahathir's advocacy for Palestine is emblematic of Malaysia's broader commitment to humanitarian values and justice, especially in contexts where Western powers have failed to act impartially.

Meanwhile, speech 5 demonstrated Malaysia's leadership in fostering solidarity among Muslim-majority and developing nations. Dr. Mahathir urged these countries to unite against dependency on Western powers and to collaborate in addressing shared challenges. The call for cooperation reflected Malaysia's stance on building a more equitable global order through collective action, particularly among nations that have historically been marginalized in global decision-making processes. This aligns with Shukri (2023) who highlighted Dr. Mahathir's efforts to position Malaysia as a unifying force within the Muslim world, emphasizing collaboration and self-reliance as pathways to counteract Western dominance.

In speech 2, Dr. Mahathir outlined Malaysia's pragmatic approach to governance, which he paralleled with his experiences as a medical doctor. By emphasizing the importance of diagnosing problems, prescribing tailored solutions, and making difficult decisions for the greater good, he reflected Malaysia's belief in practical and context-specific solutions to governance. This philosophy extended to international affairs, where Malaysia advocated for policies that are fair, effective, and considerate of diverse national contexts. Jaes et. al. (2020) echoed this sentiment by observing that Dr. Mahathir's governance model was grounded in adaptability and pragmatism which allowed Malaysia to thrive in a complex and often inequitable global landscape.

Across his speeches, Dr. Mahathir consistently opposed militarism and war. He criticized the arms trade and the exploitation of conflict for profit by highlighting the devastating impact of such practices on developing countries. Malaysia's stance was firmly rooted in the principles of peace and diplomacy, which advocated conflict resolution through dialogue and negotiation rather than violence. This is supported by Khatib et. al. (2022) who described Malaysia's foreign policy as a commitment to constructive dialogue by contrasting sharply with the militaristic approaches often employed by major powers. While Malaysia maintains friendly relations with all nations, it does not shy away from speaking out against injustices, regardless of the perpetrators. The principled stance reflected Malaysia's commitment to being a responsible and morally driven member of the international community.

Conclusion

The analysis of Dr. Mahathir's speeches highlights his role as a transformative leader who articulated Malaysia's independent and principled stance in international affairs. Through his advocacy for multilateralism, sovereignty, and justice, he positioned Malaysia as a vocal advocate for the Global South and provided a model for smaller nations seeking to assert their rights within a predominantly Western-dominated global framework. His emphasis on practical governance, rooted in equity and adaptability, reinforced Malaysia's reputation as a nation that pursues balanced and morally driven foreign policies. This study contributes to the growing scholarship on Dr. Mahathir's leadership by contextualizing his rhetoric within contemporary global challenges and Malaysia's evolving role on the world stage.

However, one limitation of this study lies in its reliance on selected speeches delivered within a defined time frame. While these speeches provide valuable insights into Dr. Mahathir's strategies and ideologies, they may not fully encapsulate the breadth of his leadership across decades or in different contexts. Dr. Mahathir's political career spans a dynamic period marked by varying global and regional challenges, and focusing on speeches from a particular phase could lead to an incomplete representation of his broader vision and policy shifts. Future studies could benefit from a comparative analysis across his two premierships to better understand the evolution of his rhetoric and its alignment with Malaysia's foreign policy goals. Despite this limitation, the findings of this study provide a critical lens for examining how small and developing nations can assert their agency in international affairs. Dr. Mahathir's speeches remain a vital resource for understanding Malaysia's diplomatic strategies and its advocacy for a more just and equitable global order.

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